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ABSTRACT

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New Teacher Confidence: How does It Develop?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the confidence levels of new teachers and related factors. Seventy-seven first and second year teachers participating in a new teacher retention project filled out a survey. Teachers felt most confident in their communication with colleagues, being sensitive to the needs of a multicultural classroom, and classroom discipline. They felt least confident in the use of portfolio assessment, arranging optimal learning opportunities for all students, time management, assess individual students' abilities, and knowledge of science subject matter. Those who went through special education or bilingual education program felt more confident than those who did not. Those who student taught in the inner city were significantly more confident than those who student taught in other environments. Interestingly, confidence was not related to type of current classroom or setting for new teachers. Implications for teacher education programs are discussed.

New teachers with high potential are jealously recruited, groomed, and polished for their entry into this ever-demanding field of endeavor. Much of this is due to the scarcity of highly qualified teachers and problematic attrition rates. More than 12% of new hires do not have formal training while another 14% do not fully meet state standards. Also, large numbers of the teachers are currently being hired. By 2005, approximately half of the teachers would have been hired in the past decade (Darling-Hammond, 1996). This is exasperated by the fact that teachers leave the field in increasing numbers within the first few years of their classroom duty. Approximately six percent of K-12 teachers left public school teaching in the United States following the end of the 1987-1988 school year (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997). Due to "burn-out" and demoralization from lack of support and adequate preparation, many new teachers leave the field within five years of their first classroom assignment (Fennick, 1992).The purpose of this study is to determine factors that are related to new teacher confidence. It is assumed that increased teacher confidence would greatly "protect" new faculty from burnout and decrease attrition rates.

Teacher and school characteristics have been linked to attrition. Perhaps the most reliable predictor of teacher attrition is age, with markedly higher rates of attrition reported for both younger and older teachers. Unfortunately, teachers with high academic ability were more likely to leave teaching than teachers of lower ability. Other factors such as gender, ethnicity, family status, class size, school size, community type, or region of the nation do not appear to influence attrition. Higher teacher salaries do seem related to teacher retention (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; Billingsley, 1993; Brownell & Smith, 1992).

Hill (1995) suggests that teachers leave their profession when they feel unchallenged, out of control of their lives, and do not have a sense of belonging. Pigge and Marso (1990) found that results of specific confidence measures showed the self-assuredness level for preservice teachers increased during their practicum and that anxiety about teaching was markedly reduced for these teachers during their clinical practice. Confidence in teaching was related to gender, personality type, and level of academic skills. The California Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program identified three targeted outcomes necessary for retention of new teachers: teaching skills, teacher confidence, and job satisfaction (Mitchell, Scott, Hendrick, Boyns; 1998)

Haipt (1990) found that her comparison of traditional college-age teacher candidates and mature-age teacher candidates showed a distinct difference in their levels of self-confidence when questioned about their prospective performance as teachers in their future classrooms. The mature-age candidates, with a variety of life experiences and career backgrounds, showed a distinctly higher degree of self-awareness and self-confidence about assuming the role of a professional educator and a guide of young minds.

Concerning intern teachers' perceptions of helpful aspects of support in the field, Smith (1989) found that interns unanimously felt that reciprocal classroom visits with mentor teachers and the support of teacher education faculty in seminars and through supervision were crucial to their effective performance.

Critical to this study are new teachers' 1) confidence levels in sixteen specific areas of teaching performance and 2) preparatory factors which, in the perception of the new teacher, contributed positively to increase this confidence. Levels of confidence which new teachers demonstrate in early placements are thought to be directly related to the contributory pre-teaching experiences in preparing one for classroom duty. This information can prove valuable in

teacher recruitment, training, and retention programs.

Methods

Subjects

Participants were self-selected from a group of new teachers in their first or second year of classroom work in a large, urban, West coast school district. All were participants in a district-university beginning teacher support collaboration. Participants come from a variety of backgrounds, preparations and life experiences, who have been placed in widely diverse urban classrooms throughout the district. They were enlisted voluntarily as participants in this study which was presented to them as an "effort which will contribute to the future success of other new teachers." Seventy-seven teachers responded.

The majority of participants were from 22 to 30 years of age (N=32, 41.5%), with the next largest group from 31 to 40 (N=28, 36%). The third largest group represented was 41 to 55 (N=16, 21%), representing the entry of mid-career-changers which are frequently seen among today's teachers undergoing preparatory studies. Reported undergraduate grade point averages for all participants was 3.22 with a standard deviation of .5.

Over half (57%) were elementary teachers. Smaller numbers were secondary (5.7%), special education (5.7%), or bilingual teachers (20.0%). The majority had formal student teaching experience in the inner city (59.7%). Smaller numbers had taught in rural (16.4%), suburban (43.2%), and military (4.5%) settings. The majority did their student teaching in an English only (60%) environment, while others were in bilingual (14.3%), or multilingual (25.7%) settings.

Most (57.1%) were in mainstream classes during student teaching while the second largest group were in bilingual (20%). Smaller numbers were in ESL (5.7%), sheltered (5.7%), special education (2.9%), or a combination of the above (8.6%). The types of current classroom

assignments reflect the diversity of the area. Only 32.5% were in mainstream classrooms with the second largest group in bilingual (28.6%). Smaller numbers were in ESL (9.1%), sheltered (7.8%), special education (6.5%), or a combination (15.6%). Over two-thirds (68%) taught in a classroom with half or more of their students speaking a non-English language.

Instrument

Teacher confidence is defined as self-reported ability to teach well. Standards set out by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education were used to create the instrument. A sixteen item Likert survey was designed to assess one's confidence in the following areas: 1) knowledge of the subject matter, 2) assessing student learning, 3) instructional techniques, 4) classroom management, 5) working with diverse students, 6) working with school community, and 7) developing as professional educator. To further validate the items, statements were compared to student teacher evaluation forms used by university supervisors. The nature of the questions made internal consistency reliability testing difficult. The Likert scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Questions were also asked to gather demographic teacher preparation and pre-teaching background information, and current classroom typology.

Procedure

Administration of the instrument was accomplished at a school site during a regular new teacher support meeting. The entire group, including faculty leaders, mentor teachers, and new teacher participants, was introduced to the study, to the background of the study and its purposes and further instructed verbally in completion of the questionnaire. After completion of the administration, the instruments were collected by the Cluster Leaders and returned the same day to the researchers. All responses were anonymous and confidential.

Results

Confidence was measured in 16 areas (Table 1). Teachers felt most confident in their communication with colleagues (M = 4.51,SD=.64), being sensitive to the needs of a multicultural classroom (M = 4.42,SD=.66), and classroom discipline (M = 4.23,SD=.72). They felt least confident in the use of portfolio assessment (M = 3.60, SD=.83), arranging optimal learning opportunities for all students (M = 3.64,SD=.84), time management (M = 3.79, SD=.87), assessing individual students' abilities (M = 3.78,SD=.84), and knowledge of science subject matter (M = 3.74, SD=.97). See Table One for complete results.

Further analysis was conducted to relate confidence to other factors. The sixteen items were summated to create an overall confidence score. Although the confidence of new teachers increased with age, the difference was not significant [F(2,74)=.457, p=.63]. Interestingly, those who went through a special education preparation program were most confident (M =71.5), followed by those in bilingual programs (M =65.1), elementary (M =63.6), and secondary (M =61.6). However, the difference was not significant [F(3,61)=1.45, p=.24].

New teachers were asked where they did their student teaching: rural, inner city, suburban, or military. The only setting that had a significant impact on confidence was the inner city. Those who did their student teaching in the inner city were significantly more confident in their teaching abilities than those in other settings, (t=-2.67, df=65, p<.01) Further analysis indicates that student teaching in the inner city was significantly related to higher confidence in being sensitive to the needs of a multicultural classroom (t=-2.33, df=65, p<.05), understanding the students' wider community (t=-3.52, df=65, p<.05), and knowing science subject matter (t=-2.28, df=63, p<.05). There were substantial, yet not statistically significant, relationships between working in the inner city and effectively communicating with parents (t=-1.64, df=65, p=.10), managing time (t=-1.87, df=64, p=.07), and knowing math subject matter (t=-1.82,

df=61, p=.07).

Interestingly, the type of teaching or setting in which new teachers are placed did not have any significant relationship with confidence. The setting in which a new teacher is teaching was not related to confidence ($F(3,73)=1.76$, $p=.16$). Likewise, the type of classroom was not related to teacher confidence ($F(4,74)=.467$, $p=.76$).

Discussion

Results of this study indicate that older teachers tend to have more confidence than younger teachers. The low statistical result may be related to the small sample size. This result supports the relationship of teacher retention and age (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997). This may be due to older teachers having been in the teaching field longer. They have more confidence in their teaching abilities and therefore at less risk of leaving the field.

Those placed in special education or bilingual classrooms had more confidence than those in regular classrooms. Again, the low statistical result may have been the result of a small sample size. However, it is intriguing to speculate that those placed in more diverse settings would develop more skills and therefore see an increase in their confidence to teach. This would be supported by the strong relationship between student teaching in an inner city school and teacher confidence.

Interestingly, the confidence of new teachers were not related to present teaching assignments. This may be a result of preparation-versus-placement differentials. While only about one third of these teachers declared they were trained in multilingual or Spanish-only classrooms, about two thirds were contracted for classrooms in which 50-100% of the students spoke a language other than English, thus leaving at least one third of them unprepared for linguistic communication with their students. Likewise, when only 27.3% of them were trained

in ESL or sheltered classrooms, 45.5% of them were later contracted for these types of classrooms, leaving at least 18.2% unprepared for the specific skills which their classrooms demanded. While 33.8% of them were trained in inner city classrooms, 83.1% were later placed in these classrooms, leaving at least 49.3% inexperienced in the complexities of inner city classroom operation.

The results of this study invite a follow-up on a larger scale. Among the limitations which must be considered when evaluating the results are: the participant population, which included by default virtually few specialized teachers (i.e., bilingual, special education); the area, which is a large urban area of mostly inner-city school populations; the district, which is a large inner-city school district; the district student population, which is widely diverse in language and culture with more than 40 distinct language groups; the participant teacher assignments, which were virtually all inner city urban classrooms.

In addition, hindsight would direct us in future follow-up research to secure demographic teacher data regarding gender, ethnicity, primary language and socio-economic background as a more detailed palette from which to draw the responses of confidence levels as these factors interact in these diverse inner city classrooms. Teacher background, as they relate to future teacher success, may assist one in the recruitment and selection process.

In summation, it is our hope that this study will support positive changes in teacher preparation and training in many ways. Teacher educators may take from this study several major areas for further attention. First, the study indicates that those in special and bilingual education programs, as well as those in urban settings, are more confident in their beginning teaching years. Further studies can focus on the aspects of such experiences as they related to teacher confidence. Secondly, it will help teacher educators to better understand candidates'

needs as they relate to one's age. Invariably those who reported more confidence had a wealth of life experience to bring to their classrooms, as supported by Baldwin's findings (1990).

This study gives insight to professional cluster leaders and district mentor teachers of the needs of beginning teachers. For example, we must require our candidates to practice teach in multicultural, multilingual inner city classrooms, when possible. The results of this study indicate that working with diverse, inner city students during student teaching increases one's confidence in a variety of areas. Future studies could investigate the specific skills that are enhanced in such diverse settings.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of New Teacher Confidence Areas

Statement	M	SD	n
effective communication with parents	4.01	.82	77
time management	3.79	.87	76
understanding your students' wider community	3.92	.77	77
knowledge of the math subject matter	4.19	.91	72
effective communication with colleagues	4.51	.64	77
sensitivity to the needs of a multicultural classroom	4.42	.66	76
large group teaching strategies	4.18	.71	75
assessing individual students' abilities	3.78	.84	77
arranging optimal learning opportunities for all students	3.64	.84	77
small group teaching strategies	4.14	.85	77
classroom discipline	4.23	.72	77
effective communication with administrators	4.05	.98	76
knowledge of science subject matter	3.74	.97	73
overall classroom organization	4.07	.79	76
knowledge of reading/language arts subject matter	3.91	.94	74
using portfolios to assess student learning	3.60	.83	77